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ACFOA

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR OVERSEAS AID

(INCORPORATED IN THE ACT)

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA URGED TO BACK EAST TIMOR PEACE OFFER

The Australian Council For Overseas Aid (ACFOA) today welcomed the new peace offer made by the East Timorese resistance and called on the Australian Government to support the initiative and promote it internationally.

'The offer represents a major breakthrough and should be widely supported because it offers the best prospect to resolve the 17 year old conflict in everyone's interests', said Russell Rollason, the Executive Director of ACFOA.

In what is described as a 'dramatic new concession', the East Timor resistance movement has offered to accept Indonesian sovereignty and limited autonomy for up to 12 years, after a ceasefire and cuts in Indonesia's military presence in East Timor.

The international representative of the resistance, Mr Jose Ramos Horta, presented details of the offer -based on immediate, unconditional peace talks with Jakarta, to senior UN officials in New York over the weekend.

The process comprises three stages over several years, namely a ceasefire and reduction of Indonesian troop levels, local autonomy and finally a referendum in East Timor under UN supervision.

'It would be tragic and irresponsible if the international community and Australia failed to throw their full weight behind this constructive proposal. There will be more bloodshed in East Timor and further tensions in Australia's relations with Indonesia if a political solution is not found', said Mr Rollason.

'Australia is contributing to peace in Cambodia, the Middle East and in other long-standing conflicts. It is time the Government demonstrated equal creativity and flexibility in respect of East Timor', said Mr Rollason.

ACFOA has been spearheading the East Timor Talks Campaign, an international initiative to resolve the conflict in East Timor through dialogue involving all parties.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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